

# Salsa Anyone?

## Interview with Hilary Clarke of Danzon

By Greg Manley

### HOW DID YOU GET INTO SALSA DANCING?

"At the age of 19 I took a gap year and went off to Italy. I ended up studying Italian in a little language school in Florence in the mornings, and spent the afternoons and evenings with my fellow students from all over the world taking in the sights and nightlife of the city. One of these students was from South America and suggested one evening we go to a salsa club. I had never heard of salsa at the time and went along for the ride. I will never forget that night – I was transfixed! The only couple-dancing I had ever seen was the formalised ballroom dancing you see on the telly, which was a world apart from this mesmerising spectacle of whirling bodies, sensuality and 'joie de vivre'!"

### HOW DID DANZON DEVELOP INTO WHAT IS IT TODAY?

Since then, I have been teaching salsa for 11 years, aiming to inspire my own students the way I had been when I first discovered the salsa scene. The scene in Dublin had developed a long way in this time, from a handful of clubs that moved venue and changed promoter frequently. We still have some of that, but now there is a much more stable scene with some classes and clubs that have been running for many years. Sandra was one of the first students at Strictly Salsa at the Garda Club. She says, "you have succeeded in building up a fantastic, successful and friendly salsa club with such an amazing atmosphere and vibe that salseros and salseras find irresistible." There is a real sense of community among the dancers, drawn together not only by the love of the music and dancing, but by the social scene which provides a non-alcohol focused way of meeting new people and gives a positive routine to people's week. As Angela, an advanced student, said, "Hilary, you brighten my Tuesdays and Thursdays!"

### WITH SUCH POSITIVE RESPONSES YOU MUST HAVE BUILT UP QUITE A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR STUDENTS?

I have a great relationship with all my students and know them all on a first-name basis. I love the fact that my students get the same joy from salsa that I do. As Sandra says: "Can't recommend Thursday night salsa club enough. It's then I feel truly alive and happy." It is also a means for people to gain confidence in themselves, "Thanks for teaching that I don't have two left feet." My favourite feedback is from Jim, who says, "Salsa is a dance with great rhythm, brings a lot of joy and happiness, which by itself is very good! Then you have salsa with Hilary, which is all I described before multiplied by 5, 6, 7...times! Great fun for life!"

### A LOT OF THE SALSA CLASSES AROUND DUBLIN ARE BASED AROUND DATING, DO YOU FIND THIS IN THE CASE WITH DANZON, OR DO YOU CATER FOR EVERYONE?

All kinds of people come to salsa for all kinds of reasons. We get a roughly even gender mix – maybe 8 men for every 10 women, and while the typical age range is 25-40, we have all ages, from 18 to 80 coming to dance. Some people come to widen their social horizons, with an eye to meeting someone special and it is great for that. With

our system of rotating partners in the class it's a way to meet and chat for two minutes before moving on to the next partner, it means that there's never a worry about what to talk about and you get to know a lot about someone when you're learning a new skill together. Some people come to salsa because they want to get more active, and find out that they hardly notice they are exercising because they are focusing on meeting people, learning the steps and having fun.

In the end though, whatever reason people start dancing salsa they often find other reasons to stick at it: the new friends, the love of dancing and the way that when you push open the door of a salsa club, you are a part of a completely different world...

**To find out more about joining the salsa scene in Dublin, visit [www.danzon.ie](http://www.danzon.ie) or contact Hilary on 087 917 2939.**

## Danzón Salsa Classes

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**No experience or partner necessary. All welcome!**

See website for details; terms and conditions apply.

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